

# LOUISIANA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

## JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 8, 2008

Department of Agriculture and Forestry Update

### **Strain Visits Farmers**

BATON ROUGE - Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Mike Strain, D.V.M., said Hurricane Gustav dumped more than 20 inches of rain on farmers across the state and damaged vital infrastructure.

Strain embarked on a tour of the rain-soaked agricultural areas over the weekend with visits to Paincourtville, White Castle, Winnsboro, Gilbert and Bunkie.

Strain is meeting with farmers on Monday afternoon at the Thomas Lingo Assembly Center in Oak Grove at noon and Goldman Equipment in Mer Rouge at 3 p.m.

On Tuesday Strain will speak with agricultural producers in Ferriday at the Highway 15 Community Center and Goldman Equipment in Lake Providence at 2:30 pm.

Strain is planning on visiting Evangeline and Pointe Coupee parishes on Wednesday but that trip may be delayed by concerns over Hurricane Ike.

"The winds knocked down much of the corn and rice that had not been harvested," Strain said. "Cotton, soybeans, sweet potatoes and pecans also took major damage. Every crop will suffer major loss"

Strain told the gathered farmers that he and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry is doing everything it can to expedite repair of electrical service and other infrastructure.

"We're here to help and we want to help," Strain said. "We've provided thousands of gallons of fuel directly to farmers and processors and gotten the power companies to get the grain elevators and driers running."

Strain said he has been in constant contact with United State Department of Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer and briefed President Bush on agricultural damages caused by the hurricane.

"We're urging USDA Secretary Schafer to closely monitor the sugar cane situation and wait to make any decisions about sugar quotas until after a full crop assessment is made," Strain said.

Strain added that he will seek a federal disaster declaration for agriculture.

"I'm positive that's going to happen," Strain said.

Strain also said that direct federal disaster payments to farmers are a possibility.

The standing water in agricultural fields will hinder the remaining harvest, Strain said.

"I've been told that this is the worst late season flooding that anyone can remember," Strain said.

Strain said the sweet potato crop most likely suffered a 50 percent loss at a minimum and cotton will suffer a 30 to 50 percent loss in some areas.

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